



NJDOE News

Contact: Peter Peretzman
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State Board Considers the Establishment of a Process To Return Jersey City School District to Local Control

The State Board of Education today considered a resolution at its regularly scheduled monthly meeting that would establish a process for returning the Jersey City School District to local control.

The board discussed a recommendation by the Commissioner of Education and the State Board State Operated School District Committee that the Jersey City State District Superintendent make it his general policy to transfer decision-making authority on all curriculum issues and the writing of the district's policy manual to the Jersey City Board of Education during the period from July 1 of this year through June 30, 2000.

The plan recommends that the Commissioner seek amendments to the state operation statutes in the legislative session commencing January 2000, which would redefine the exit requirements for state operation. Under current law the Commissioner cannot recommend a district return to local control unless that State-operated district is certified. The proposed new criteria would allow districts to resume local control if they are certified **or** have demonstrated improvement toward achievement of a plan leading to certification, and have demonstrated an ability to resume governance. If enacted, the new legislation could enable a formal end to state operation commencing in July 2000, provided the new exit criteria were met and continuous progress in the district is maintained.

"The Jersey City School District has made significant progress and is now ready to begin the process to return to local control," said Commissioner of Education David Hespe. "We have heard from the Jersey City community on this issue, and their message is clear. The community wants its schools back and believes it will be able to continue providing to its children the same high quality education now being provided by the state. I believe this action by the board moves Jersey City significantly closer to local operation.

"By giving the Jersey City Board of Education real decision making power, the district will be able to engage in self-governance for the first time in more than a decade. The fact is that if Jersey City had offered in 1988 the high quality education they are offering now, they would not have been taken over."

The State Board's process also recommends that the state operation law be amended to provide a structure to allow for a gradual ceding of authority to the local board of education, and an oversight mechanism to allow for expedited state intervention in the event that continuous progress is not maintained. This structure would address the issue of continued state oversight for a period after return of local control when the district faces the greatest risk of backsliding into the problems that precipitated the original takeover.

"Jersey City has made significant progress over the last decade," said State Board member David Brandt, the chairman of the board's State-Operated School District Committee. "The action we are discussing would allow for a gradual assumption of local control during the next school year in preparation for a subsequent full return to local control."

"This is what the Jersey City community has been waiting for," said Gregg Butterfield, President of the Jersey City Board of Education. "We support the proposed changes in the State-Operated School District law that would facilitate the complete return of our school district to us. The local transition discussion group that is currently being developed in Jersey City will play an active role in implementing the process. We are in full support of the action that will be taken by the State Board next month and look forward to assuming more responsibility over district operations in the upcoming school year."

"The Jersey City community deserves greater control of its schools than it has now," said State District Superintendent Richard DiPatri. "When the state entered Jersey City more than 10 years ago the district was meeting only 37% of the state's monitoring indicators. Now the district is meeting nearly all of the indicators, and progress on the state test scores has been consistently strong for many years. I have full confidence in the board's ability to carry out its increased responsibilities in the next school year."

"The Jersey City Board of Education and the community have clearly shown through the performance of the district that they are ready for the increased responsibility they are about to assume," said Maud Dahme,

President of the State Board of Education. "The process we are considering is designed to provide the local board of education with increased responsibility, while at the same time seeking changes to the law would allow the State Board to fulfill its responsibility to the children of Jersey City to ensure that their education is secured while gradually ceding power to the local board of education contingent upon its own performance."